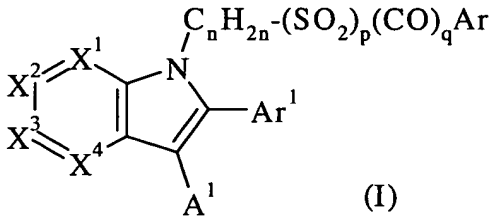
IN THE CLAIMS

The listing of the claims which follows replaces any and all prior versions and/or listings of the claims in the application.

1. (original) A compound of formula (I), or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt thereof:



(I)

wherein:

Ar is a moiety containing at least one aromatic ring and possesses 5-, 6-, 9- or 10-ring atoms 0 to 3 of which may be N, O or S heteroatoms of which at most 1 will be O or S; which moiety may be optionally substituted by groups Q^1, Q^2 or Q^3 wherein Q^1 is a hydroxy group, fluorine, chlorine, bromine or iodine atom or a C_{1-6}alkyl, C_{1-6}alkyl substituted by not more than 5 fluorine atoms, C_{1-6}alkoxyl, C_{1-6}alkoxyl substituted by not more than 5 fluorine atoms, C_{2-6}alkenyl, C_{2-6}alkynyl, $(CH_2)_{0-3}N(C_{1-4}alkyl)_2$, nitro, cyano, nitrile, carboxyl, esterified carboxy wherein the esterifying moiety has up to 4 carbon atoms optionally substituted by not more than 5 fluorine atoms; or $-SO_2(C_{1-6}alkyl)$,

Q_2 is a fluorine, chlorine, bromine or iodine atom or a methyl, trifluoromethyl, methoxy, trifluoromethoxy or difluoromethoxy group,

Q_3 is a fluorine, chlorine, bromine or iodine atom or a methyl, methoxy, trifluoromethoxy or difluoromethoxy group;

Ar^1 is a moiety containing at least one aromatic ring and possesses 5-, 6-, 9- or 10-ring atoms 0 to 3 of which may be N, O or S heteroatoms of which at most 1 will be O or S; which moiety may be optionally substituted by groups Q^4, Q^5 or Q^6 wherein Q^4 is a hydroxy group, fluorine, chlorine, bromine or iodine atom or a C_{1-6}alkyl, C_{1-6}alkyl substituted by not more than 5 fluorine atoms, C_{1-6}alkoxyl, C_{1-6}alkoxyl substituted by not more than 5 fluorine atoms, C_{2-6}alkenyl or alkynyl, nitro, cyano, nitrile, carboxyl, esterified carboxy wherein the esterifying moiety has up to 4 carbon atoms optionally substituted by not more than 5 fluorine atoms,

Q^5 is a fluorine, chlorine, bromine or iodine atom or a methyl, trifluoromethyl, methoxy, trifluoromethoxy or difluoromethoxy group,

Q^6 is a fluorine, chlorine, bromine or iodine atom or a methyl, methoxy, trifluoromethoxy or difluoromethoxy group;

X^1 is N or CR^a; X^2 is N or CR^1; X^3 is N or CR^2; X^4 is N or CR^b; with the proviso that at least one of X^2 and X^3 is not N; wherein R^a and R^b are independently selected from hydrogen, fluorine or chlorine or C_{1-4}alkyl, C_{2-4}alkenyl, C_{1-4}alkoxy, C_{1-4}alkyl or alkoxy optionally substituted by up to 6 fluorine atoms and/or a hydroxyl group;

n is 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 or 6;

p+q is 0 or 1;

A^1 is C_{1-6}alkyl, C_{2-6}alkenyl, or C_{1-6}alkyl or C_{2-6}alkenyl substituted by C_{1-4}alkoxy or up to 5 fluorine atoms or a non-aromatic ring of 3 to 8 ring atoms which may contain a double bond and which may contain a O, S, SO, SO_2 or NH moiety and which may be optionally substituted by one or two alkyl groups of up to 2 carbon atoms or by 1 to 8 fluorine atoms;

one of R^1 and R^2 is a Het or is hydrogen, fluorine, chlorine or bromine atom or a C_{1-4}alkyl, C_{2-4}alkenyl, C_{1-4}alkoxy, C_{1-4}alkyl or alkoxy substituted by up to 5 fluorine atoms, nitrile, carboxy, C_{1-4}alkoxycarbonyl, C_{1-4}alkyl or C_{2-4}alkenyl substituted by a carboxy or C_{1-4}alkoxycarbonyl group, or a NR^3R^4, $SO_2NR^3R^4$ or $CONR^3R^4$ group where R^3 is hydrogen, C_{1-4}alkyl, SO_2R^5 or COR^5 and R^4 is hydrogen, hydroxyl or C_{1-4}alkyl or R^3 and R^4 are alkylene linked to form a 5- or 6-membered ring, and R^5 is C_{1-4}alkyl optionally substituted by up to 5 fluorine atoms;

Het is a 5 or 6-membered aromatic ring of which 1, 2, 3 or 4 ring atoms may be selected from N, O, S with at most 1 being O or S which ring may be substituted by 1 or 2 groups selected C_{1-4}alkyl or hydroxy or tautomers thereof, or is 2-hydroxy-cyclobutene-3,4-dione;

the other of R^1 and R^2 is a hydrogen, fluorine or chlorine atom or C_{1-4}alkyl, C_{2-4}alkenyl, C_{1-4}alkoxy, C_{1-4}alkyl or alkoxy substituted by up to 6 fluorine atoms and optionally a hydroxyl.

2. (original) A compound as claimed in Claim 1 wherein R^a is hydrogen.

3. (currently amended) A compound as claimed in ~~Claim 1 or~~ Claim 2 wherein R^b is hydrogen.

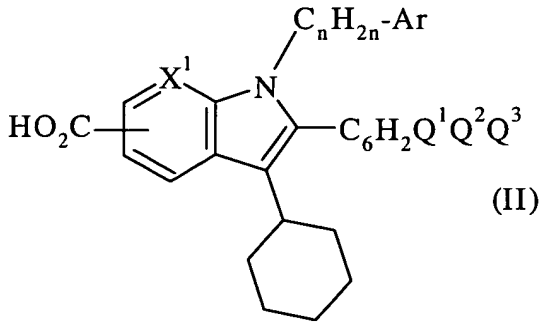
4. (currently amended) A compound as claimed in Claim 3 ~~any one of Claims 1 to 3~~ wherein Ar is optionally substituted phenyl, pyridyl, imidazolyl, thiazolyl or oxadiazolyl, where the optional substituent is selected from fluorine, chlorine, bromine, C_{1-6}alkyl, hydroxyl, C_{1-6}alkoxy, CF_3, cyano, carboxyl, methylsulfonyl and $(CH_2)_{0-3}N(C_{1-4}alkyl)_2$.

5. (currently amended) A compound as claimed in Claim 4 ~~any one of Claims 1 to 4~~ wherein n is 0, 1 or 2.

6. (currently amended) A compound as claimed in Claim 5 ~~any one of Claims 1 to 5~~ wherein Ar^1 is phenyl, naphthyl, indolyl, tetrahydronaphthyl, pyridyl, imidazolyl, furyl, thienyl, pyrolidyl, oxazolyl, thiazolyl, pyrazolyl, pyridazolyl, triazolyl, oxadiazolyl, thiodiazolyl or quinonyl, optionally substituted by Q^4, Q^5 or Q^6 as defined in Claim 1.

7. (currently amended) A compound as claimed in Claim 6 ~~any one of Claims 1 to 6~~ wherein Ar is cyclohexyl.

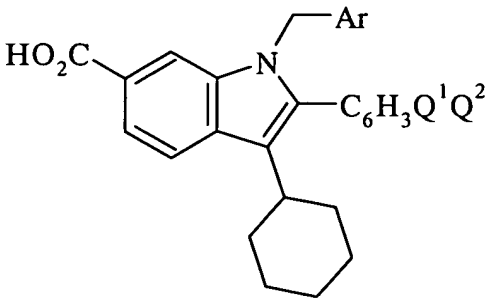
8. (currently amended) A compound as claimed in Claim 1 of formula (II):



(II)

~~wherein n, X^1, Ar, Q^1, Q^2 and Q^3 are as defined in Claim 1~~ or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt thereof.

9. (currently amended) A compound according to claim 8 of formula (III):



(III)

~~wherein Ar, Q^1 and Q^2 are defined in Claim 1~~ or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt thereof.

10. (original) A compound as claimed in Claim 1 selected from:

1-benzyl-3-cyclohexyl-2-phenyl-1*H*-indole-5-carboxylic acid,

1-benzyl-3-cyclohexyl-2-pyridin-2-yl-1*H*-indole-6-carboxylic acid,

1-benzyl-3-cyclohexyl-2-(4-methoxyphenyl)-1*H*-indole-6-carboxylic acid,

3-cyclohexyl-1,2-diphenyl-1*H*-indole-6-carboxylic acid,

1-benzyl-3-cyclohexyl-2-phenyl-1*H*-indole-6-carboxylic acid,

3-cyclohexyl-1-(4-methylbenzyl)-2-phenyl-1*H*-indole-6-carboxylic acid,

3-cyclohexyl-1-[(2-methyl-1,3-thiazol-4-yl)methyl]-2-phenyl-1*H*-indole-6-carboxylic acid,

3-cyclohexyl-1-(3-methylbenzyl)-2-phenyl-1*H*-indole-6-carboxylic acid,

3-cyclohexyl-2-phenyl-1-(pyridin-2-ylmethyl)-1*H*-indole-6-carboxylic acid trifluoroacetate,

3-cyclohexyl-1-[4-(methylsulfonyl)benzyl]-2-phenyl-1*H*-indole-6-carboxylic acid,

3-cyclohexyl-1-(3,5-dibromobenzyl)-2-phenyl-1*H*-indole-6-carboxylic acid,

3-cyclohexyl-1-(1H-imidazol-4-ylmethyl)-2-phenyl-1H-indole-6-carboxylic acid trifluoroacetate,

3-cyclohexyl-2-phenyl-1-(pyridin-3-ylmethyl)-1*H*-indole-6-carboxylic acid hydrochloride,

3-cyclohexyl-2-(2-fluorophenyl)-1-(2-phenylethyl)-1*H*-indole-6-carboxylic acid,

1-(3-cyanobenzyl)-3-cyclohexyl-2-phenyl-1*H*-indole-6-carboxylic acid,

3-cyclohexyl-2-phenyl-1-(pyridin-2-ylmethyl)-1*H*-indole-6-carboxylic acid hydrochloride,

1-(3-carboxybenzyl)-3-cyclohexyl-2-phenyl-1*H*-indole-6-carboxylic acid,

3-cyclohexyl-2-(4-hydroxyphenyl)-1-[(4-methylphenyl)sulfonyl]-1*H*-indole-6-carboxylic acid,

1-benzoyl-3-cyclohexyl-2-phenyl-1*H*-indole-6-carboxylic acid,

3-cyclohexyl-2-phenyl-1-(phenylsulfonyl)-1*H*-indole-6-carboxylic acid,

1-benzyl-3-cyclohexyl-2-(3-{[isopropyl(methyl)amino]-methyl}phenyl)-1*H*-indole-6-carboxylic acid,

3-cyclohexyl-1-({5-[(dimethylamino)methyl]-1,2,4-oxadiazol-3-yl}methyl)-2-phenyl-1-1*H*-indole-6-carboxylic acid,

or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt thereof.

11. (canceled)

12. (canceled)

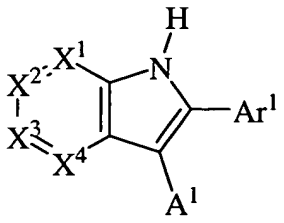
13. (currently amended) A pharmaceutical composition comprising a compound as claimed in Claim 1, ~~any one of Claims 1 to 10,~~ or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt thereof, in association with a pharmaceutically acceptable carrier.

14. (currently amended) The pharmaceutical composition as claimed in Claim 13 which further comprises one or more other agents for the treatment of viral infections. ~~infections such as an antiviral agent, or an immunomodulatory agent such as α , β or γ interferon.~~

15. (currently amended) A method of inhibiting hepatitis C virus polymerase and/or of treating or preventing an illness due to hepatitis C virus, which comprises ~~the method involving~~ administering to a human or animal ~~(preferably mammalian)~~ subject suffering from the condition a therapeutically or prophylactically effective amount of ~~the pharmaceutical composition claimed in Claim 13 or Claim 14 or of~~ a compound as claimed in Claim 1, ~~any one of Claims 1 to 10,~~ or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt thereof.

16. (currently amended) A method of preparation of a pharmaceutical composition, which comprises ~~involving~~ admixing at least one compound as claimed in Claim 1, ~~any one of Claims 1 to 10,~~ or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt thereof, with one or more pharmaceutically acceptable adjuvants, diluents or carriers and/or with one or more other therapeutically or prophylactically active agents.

17. (currently amended) A process to prepare a compound as claimed in Claim 1 ~~any one of Claims 1 to 10~~ which comprises the reaction of compounds of the formulae (IV) and (V):

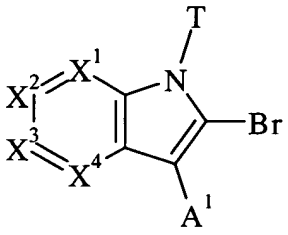


(IV)

(V)

wherein X^1, X^2, X^3, X^4, A^1, Ar^1, Ar, n, p and q are as defined in Claim 1 and L is a ~~good~~ leaving group. ~~group such as chlorine, bromine, iodine, methanesulfonate, tolyenesulfonate, triflate or the like.~~

18. (currently amended) A process to prepare a compound as claimed in Claim 1 ~~any one of Claims 1 to 10~~ which comprises reacting the compound of the formula (VI):



(VI)

wherein T is a $C_nH_{2n}(SO_2)_p(CO)_qAr$ group with $Ar^1B(OH)_2$ in the presence of a Pd[0] catalyst wherein X^1, X^2, X^3, X^4, A^1, Ar^1, Ar, n, p and q are as defined in Claim 1.

19. (new) A method for inhibiting hepatitis C virus polymerase or treating or preventing an illness due to hepatitis C virus, which comprises administering to a human or animal subject suffering from the condition a therapeutically or prophylactically effective amount of the pharmaceutical composition of Claim 13.